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Johannine Christianity - Jewish Christianity?

JAMES F. MCGRATH

SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF J. LOUIS MARTYN'S DECISIVE STUDY, *HISTORY AND Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (1979), there has been a growing consensus among Johannine scholars that the Gospel of John was composed in the context of conflict with the synagogue, and that it is thus best understood and interpreted against the background of Judaism and Jewish Christianity¹. However, several recent studies have sought to challenge this position, primarily on two fronts: Johannine Christology (Casey 1991:23-38) and the Johannine attitude towards the Torah (Schnelle 1992:31-36). These recent challenges to the growing consensus have also pointed to the Johannine attitude toward 'the Jews' as corroborating evidence to support their case. It would seem in order, then, to study these three key aspects of John's Gospel—Christology, Torah, and 'the

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¹ So e.g. Ashton, Brown, Charlesworth, Cullmann, Dahl, Dunn, Meeks, Pancaro, Smith and Whitacre. Some have followed Martyn in using the term 'Christian Jews' for this earlier period (i.e. when some Jews happened to be Christians), saving the term 'Jewish Christians' for the later period (when there was a minority of Jewish believers in a predominantly Gentile church). This distinction is helpful, but the term 'Jewish Christianity' is retained here because it is more familiar, and also in order to retain the sense of continuity between the two phenomena.

Jews'—in order to see whether and to what extent they demonstrate Johannine Christianity to be essentially Jewish or non-Jewish.

DEFINING JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

Schnelle, in the work just cited, mentions several times the need for a clear definition of what precisely is meant by Jewish Christianity. J. Daniélou suggests three possible meanings for this term: "First, it may designate *those Jews who acknowledged Christ as a prophet or a Messiah, but not as the Son of God*, and thus form a separate class, half-way between Jews and Christians... The second possible reference for the term 'Jewish Christianity' is *the Christian community of Jerusalem*, dominated by James and the tendencies for which he stood. This community was perfectly orthodox in its Christianity but remained attached to certain Jewish ways of life, without, however, imposing them on proselytes from paganism... Finally, a third possible reference of the term 'Jewish Christianity' is a type of *Christian thought expressing itself in forms borrowed from Judaism*" (1964:7-9).

This definition provides a useful starting point for our discussion, but it needs to be examined critically before we proceed. Firstly, the third category (which is the one that Daniélou himself is most concerned with) is too broad for our purposes. Johannine Christianity, like all forms of Christianity represented in the New Testament, was still working with the language and images current in Judaism. Indeed, as Daniélou's study shows, Jewish imagery and modes of thought played a very important role in many streams of Christianity even when it ceased to be a predominantly Jewish phenomenon. We must find a narrower definition of 'Jewish Christianity' for the purpose of this study.

The difficulties involved in defining Jewish Christianity are well known (cf. Riegel 1977; Colpe 1993). For example, although one might suggest that Jewish Christianity be defined in ethnic terms, this becomes impossible when we consider that one may be ethnically Jewish and yet apostatize from the Jewish religion. It would seem that the definition of 'Jewish Christianity' is plagued by all of the difficulties involved in defining 'Judaism' during this period (cf. Casey 1991, ch. 2). Rather than work only with a theoretical definition, therefore, a better methodology will be to relate the Gospel of John to what is universally recognized as a Jewish

Christian *document*. For our purposes, we may consider in particular the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*². This work is generally accepted as stemming from a Jewish Christian group, most likely Ebionites³.

We may take this line of approach because it appears, as has been suggested by a number of recent scholars, that Daniélou's first two categories overlap to a large extent. James Dunn, in one of his studies of earliest Christianity, has noted that "*Heretical Jewish Christianity would appear to be not so very different from the faith of the first Jewish believers*" (1990:242). Dunn examines three aspects of 'heretical' Jewish Christianity (such as Ebionitism) which he finds to coincide largely with the beliefs of earliest Palestinian Christianity as represented in the New Testament: (a) adherence to the Law; (b) exaltation of James and denigration of Paul;⁴ (c) adoptionism (1990:240-243). It would appear that, contrary to Daniélou's suggestion, there is no firm boundary between the faith of the earliest Jerusalem community of Jewish Christians and the later forms of Jewish Christianity which were eventually deemed 'heretical'. This is not to say that they were in all respects identical, but merely that they were fundamentally similar, and that there was sufficient continuity between them for it to be legitimate to group them together under the single heading, 'Jewish Christianity'. A similar conclusion has been reached by C. Colpe (1993:75) and G. Quispel (1972:137-140; see also Schoeps 1949:257).

² On the Pseudo-Clementine Literature see Schoeps (1949, 1956); Strecker (1981). Schoeps himself adopts the method of focusing on documents rather than abstract definitions of Jewish Christianity (1949:7), and considers the Pseudo-Clementine literature an extremely important witness (1949:37). The *Recognitions* have been chosen because they bear a greater affinity to Johannine thought than do the *Homilies*.

³ The earliest strata of the work is perhaps as early as the second century C.E. (Daniélou 1964:59; Schoeps 1949:54f), and it had probably, after a complicated process of composition and development, reached more or less its final form by some time during the third or fourth century (cf. Strecker 1981:255-270).

⁴ It will not be worth dwelling on this feature: it is notable in John only by its absence. There is no defence of Paul or his views, nor are these opposed. Given the evidence noted below, we cannot say that the Gospel of John provides any clear indication that the teaching of Paul is presupposed. Certain developments (such as Wisdom Christology) which are reflected in Paul are found also in John, but these can be understood as part of their common inheritance from earlier Christianity rather than in terms of Johannine dependence on Paul (so also Scroggs 1988:105). See further n.16 below.

In this study, therefore, we can limit ourselves for the most part to a study of the similarities which exist in these three key areas between the Gospel of John on the one hand, and Jewish Christianity as represented by later literature such as the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* on the other. Obviously, given the difference in date between these works, we may expect to find significant differences as well. However, it is still a useful undertaking to attempt to determine whether there is a 'trajectory', a continuous stream of development in which both John and the *Recognitions* are included, which may be categorized as 'Jewish Christianity' (cf. Schoeps 1949:257; Martyn 1977b). A study of these similarities, and an attempt to answer the objections raised by scholars such as Casey and Schnelle, will be the focus of the rest of this work. For convenience we may continue to speak of 'Jewish Christianity' as an umbrella term for the Pseudo-Clementines and for other literature and streams of thought which contain the features which will concern us in this study (See further Quispel 1972:137-139; Schoeps 1949:8).

CHRISTOLOGY

The Christology of Jewish Christianity has been characterized as 'adoptionist', a relatively modern term denoting a Christology in which Jesus becomes 'Son of God' in a unique sense *at his baptism*.⁵ In this stream of early Christian thought, the Christ/Holy Spirit comes upon or enters into the man Jesus. The heavenly being who comes upon Jesus is subordinate to God,⁶ and this incarnation takes place at the baptism of Jesus rather than at his birth.

What is interesting is that several scholars have proposed that John be read in precisely this way (So e.g. Watson 1987, Fuller 1990, Talbert 1992:45f, 75f; 1993; cf. Schoonenberg 1986). As Talbert notes (1992:75), we are accustomed to read John in light of the Synoptics, as has tradition-

⁵ It should be noted that Daniélou's statement (1964:56) that 'heretical' Jewish Christians such as the Ebionites did not accept Jesus as Son of God is mistaken: they did accept this title, but did not understand it in the same way that later Nicene and Chalcedonian orthodoxy would.

⁶ Cf. Hofrichter (1992). The exact relationship of Jesus/the Logos to God did not become a major issue, and therefore was not clearly defined, until much later than John's time.

ally been done in the Church, and thus to understand the incarnation in John as having taken place at Jesus' conception. However, given that the conception and birth of Jesus are not recounted in John, and that, for the vast majority of Jews and Christians of this period, the Logos and the Holy Spirit were not clearly distinct entities,⁷ it becomes a strong possibility that early readers of John's Gospel would have understood the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus as describing the same event as that described in the prologue as the Word becoming flesh. Further evidence for this may perhaps be found in 1 John 5:6-8, which is regarded by many as evidence that there was a debate between the author of 1 John and his opponents about whether the Christ left Jesus before the crucifixion, and thus did not suffer.⁸ If this is a correct reading, then the author of 1 John agreed with his opponents that the Christ came 'through water,' i.e. at Jesus' baptism.⁹

C. K. Barrett, in his article on subordinationist Christology (1982), noted that John, while in one sense the basis of later orthodox Christological formulas, is in another sense a challenge to traditional Christology, containing elements that do not seem to fit. The key aspect which he focuses on is subordinationism, a feature which is represented both in John and in Jewish Christianity. In John, the main objection which 'the Jews' bring against the Jesus is that he 'makes himself equal with God' or 'claims to be God.' Jesus, however, is not presented as readily defending his equality with God or divinity, but rather as emphasizing the Son's dependence on the Father in all things (John 5:19), or as appealing to the wider use of the term 'God' in the Hebrew Bible (John 10:34-36).¹⁰

⁷ The most notable example is Justin Martyr, who frequently uses the terms interchangeably. On the similar phenomenon in Philo see Talbert (1993:45f). This point is also noted by Dunn (1989:266).

⁸ This is not to imply a wholesale identification of the opponents with Cerinthians, but simply to note a similarity in this one area. See the discussion of this passage in Brown (1982:573-578); Talbert (1993:49f).

⁹ Of course, the Fourth Gospel does not mention that Jesus was baptised by John. However, this is presumably due to a concern not to present Jesus as in any way inferior to the Baptist. There is no real reason to doubt that the author knew the tradition attested to in the Synoptics that it was at Jesus' baptism that John the Baptist witnessed the descent of the Spirit upon him.

¹⁰ In John 10:30, Jesus claims oneness with the Father. In the context of the chapter, and of the Gospel as a whole, this clearly should be understood in terms

His 'blasphemy' in using the divine name for himself (8:58f) is the use of a name rightly his, not because of his own inherent and eternal possession of it, but because the Father has given it to him (17:11). The same is true of his 'glory' (17:22).

The argument in John 10 concerning the use of the title 'God' is remarkably close to the argument in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 2.42,¹¹ where Peter is described as explaining that there is only one true God, the God of the Jews, and yet also explains how the term 'god' can be used more widely, including for Christ. The same work also speaks of Jesus in very Johannine terms: "although he was the Son of God, and the beginning of all things, he became man" (1.45), and further: "the Son...has been with the Father from the beginning, and through all generations...the Son reveals the Father to those who honour the Son as they honour the Father" (2.48). In 1.43, Peter is described as asserting that the only difference between Christians and Jews is the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah; for John, this is also the key (if not the only) difference.

Further, as even Maurice Casey would himself agree, the Johannine Christians did not move from Jewish monotheism to pagan polytheism: they regarded Jesus as divine, but would not have accepted the exaltation of other persons or beings to similar status (1991:37f). For John, the Father of Jesus, who is the God of the Jews, is "the only true God" (John 17:3), even though John, like the author of the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, can use the term God more broadly. The reason why Casey cannot regard Johannine Christology as a Jewish development is that he will not allow John the broader definition of monotheism which he allows to Philo and other clearly Jewish authors (Casey 1991:93; for a helpful discussion and bibliography on the difficulty of defining monotheism, see Stuckenbruck 1995:15-21). One cannot help but wonder whether, if 'Philonism' had developed into an independent religion, he would not have rejected Philo as well for having moved too far away from 'orthodox Judaism'. As scholars are continuously seeking to remind us, it was only

of unity rather than identification. 'The Jews' in this chapter apparently understood Jesus to be claiming the latter, but this is a *misunderstanding* on their part, which results (as so frequently in John) from Jesus' use of a *double entendre*.

¹¹ Both Schoeps (1949:51) and Strecker (1981:265) consider this passage to come from a source used by both the Pseudo-Clementine works, thus making it somewhat earlier than the finished *Recognitions* or *Homilies*.

after A.D. 70 that an 'orthodox' Judaism even *began* to emerge, and when it did, both Philo and John were defined out.¹² As Philip S. Alexander remarks, "There can now be no question that early Judaism did know of powerful semi-divine mediator figures, so the high Christology of some of the early Christian writings can actually be given a *Jewish* context" (Alexander 1992:19f; see further the balanced criticisms of Casey in Dunn 1994).

We have thus seen that John's Christology can be understood in such a way as to be essentially in agreement with that of Jewish Christianity. That the Johannine Christians were expelled from their local synagogue largely on account of their christological beliefs does not present a problem, since it is not by any means clear that the group of Jewish Christians represented by the Pseudo-Clementine literature were still attending synagogue, or that their christology was any more acceptable to their local Jewish community than that of the Johannine Christians. However, it must be acknowledged that the *Recognitions* does not express the same depth of hostility to 'the Jews' which we find in John, and an explanation for this aspect of the Fourth Gospel will need to be provided (see below).

TORAH

Another key feature of Jewish Christianity is continued adherence to the Torah and observance of Jewish customs and practices. Schnelle considers that "The Gospel of John cannot be interpreted as a witness to Jewish Christianity. On the contrary, it reflects both a historical and a theological distance from Judaism...The distance that already exists between the Fourth Gospel and Judaism is clearly evident from the Gospel's understanding of the law" (1992:31). However, it is not clear anywhere in the Gospel of John that the Johannine Christians no longer kept the Torah; in fact, S. Pancaro has arrived at exactly the opposite conclusion from Schnelle:

¹² On the diversity of first-century Judaism see also Johnson (1989:426-428); Neusner (1993:2-3). Overman's description (1990:38-43) of Jamnia as "the beginning of the end of sectarianism" is a helpful and balanced formulation.

[I]t would appear that Jn is to be situated in a Jewish milieu, that his community is formed by Jewish-Christians who observe the Law, but who differ from their Jewish brethren because of the faith they have in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God and, consequently, in the attitude they assume towards the Law. While they follow it, they do not agree that their relationship to God is determined by their relationship to the Law, that God has revealed himself and his will exclusively in the Law. They claim that a Jew, however faithful to the Law of Moses, cannot be saved unless he believes in Jesus as the Christ (Pancaro 1975:530; similar conclusions are reached by J. L. Martyn 1977a:158f; Whitacre 1982:64-68. See also the discussion in Smiga 1992:141-148).

Schnelle's reading of John is not as convincing as Pancaro's precisely because it does not do justice to the depth of feeling in John surrounding the controversy with the Jews and the expulsion from the synagogue (this criticism is also raised against him by Menken 1993:308). He also does not sufficiently justify his readings of certain passages, and throughout his discussion he gives the impression that he is reading John, as it were, through Pauline spectacles. It is by no means clear to the present writer why John 6:32 and 7:22 prove that "the divine legitimation given to Moses is clearly disparaged" (Schelle 1992:31)¹³ nor why 4:20-24 means that "Christians...have left the stage of a religion of law behind them" (Schelle 1992:31).¹⁴ He criticizes Pancaro for leaving his treatment of John 1:17 until the end of his book (Schnelle 1992:31 n.200), but it is not

¹³ In 6:32 there is presumably a contrast between the Torah and/or Moses and Christ (cf. Brown 1966:262; Lindars 1972:250), but 'disparaged' is unjustifiably harsh in this context. The contrasts between Jesus and Moses or Torah must be placed in the context of the conflict between the Johannine Christians and the synagogue: the rabbis claimed to be Moses' disciples (John 9:28f), and John emphatically makes the point that Moses is not God's final word, that Moses himself pointed to one who would come in the future. It may be further noted that, even if it is the case that John 6 contrasts Jesus with the Law or with Moses more sharply than the rest of the Gospel, this may also be because the chapter is part of the latest strata of the Gospel, as Lindars (1972:50) has suggested. See further the debate about the relationship between Moses and Jesus in Ps.-Clem. *Recognitions*, I.58-59.

¹⁴ The reference in John 4:20ff is to worship which does not involve the Temple; the Ebionites also rejected the Temple and sacrifice while still feeling loyal to Torah in other respects.

clear that this rather ambiguous verse should be used to interpret the rest of John, rather than vice versa. On its own, and even in the context of the whole prologue, 1:17 could be either antithetic or synthetic parallelism (Pancaro 1975:537). It is possible to read 1:16f in a way quite different from that proposed by Schnelle (for one such reading, cf. Edwards 1988).

Further, as Pancaro notes (1975:499), apart from a passing reference to circumcision in 7:21-23, the only precept of the Torah mentioned in John is the Sabbath. It is frequent to note that in John, Jesus is more clearly presented as breaking the Sabbath (giving an order to take up the mat; making mud and anointing the eyes). Yet the key force of John's argument in a Jewish context is frequently missed. Scholars frequently note the fact that it appears to have been generally accepted in Jewish thought that God 'works' in some sense on the Sabbath (cf. the references in Dodd 1953:320-323 and Barrett 1978:256). What needs to be noted in addition to this is that in Judaism to keep the Sabbath was conceived of in terms of imitating God (Gen.2:2f). This point seems to lie behind the argument in John: in what sense can it be a breaking of the Sabbath to participate in the work of God? John wishes to show not that the Sabbath is abolished, but that doing God's work (of healing), like obeying the Law of Moses in circumcising a child, overrides the Sabbath, precisely because it is a participation in the work of God himself.

A further point which needs to be examined is the fact that John consistently speaks of 'your Law' or 'the Law of the Jews'. Several scholars have suggested that this does not in fact imply that John is putting distance between himself and Judaism/Torah, but that he is using the language of polemic: 'the very Law to which you appeal in condemning us says....' Quite recently, B. G. Schuchard has suggested that this feature of Johannine language does not have any negative connotations, but rather emphasizes Jewish blindness in respect to their own scriptures (1992:154f n.13). It is for this reason dubious to appeal to this feature in the Fourth Gospel as evidence that the author wished to distance himself and his community from Judaism and its scriptures.

We may note briefly the relationship between John and the Pseudo-Clementines in this area.¹⁵ If in John the observance of the precepts of Torah is not an issue, by the time the later Ebionite literature was com-

¹⁵ On this subject see Schoeps (1949, ch.3); Strecker (1981:162-171, 179-184). The view of the Pseudo-Clementines concerning the Law is found in both

posed it had become one. The reason for this is presumably the move from being a minority of believers in Jesus among a Jewish majority to being a minority of Jewish believers in a predominantly Gentile church. One distinctive aspect of the Pseudo-Clementine literature is its emphatic opposition to the Temple cult. While this may bear some relation to John 4:20-24, there are also significant differences. The most striking of these is the Ebionite teaching that positive references in the Old Testament to sacrifice (and other practices to which they were opposed) were 'false pericopae.' Here there is a striking difference from John, and in this case John would appear closer to the position of the majority of Jews in his time than the Pseudo-Clementines were. If the latter are rightly called Jewish Christian, then the title would seem to be appropriate to John as well, at least as far as his attitude to the Law is concerned.

Here again, it cannot be said that we have proved that the Gospel of John is a Jewish Christian document. However, it has hopefully been demonstrated that there is simply no clear evidence in the Gospel of John itself that Johannine Christians were not Torah-observant. Most scholars who consider that the Johannine Christians did *not* keep the Law have to suggest that the debate over Torah (in which Paul was engaged) lies in the past, so that John can assume it without mention. This is not impossible, but seems unlikely given the conflict with the synagogue that appears to be reflected in John. John reflects the accusations of 'the Jews' against the Johannine Christians in Christology and other areas and seeks to address them, and it would be surprising for him not to do so concerning the issue of Torah observance, were this at issue in the conflict. In fact, the only accusation of failure to observe Torah in John is made by Jesus against the Jews (John 7:19)! The most that is said of the Johannine Christians is that they are 'ignorant of the Law,' i.e. '*amme ha-aretz*'. The most logical explanation for the evidence of John is that the issue between the Johannine Christians and the synagogue was *Christology* and not *Torah observance*.¹⁶ This again would match what we know of Jewish Christianity.

the *Recognitions* and the *Homilies*, and is traceable to their common source, the *Preaching of Peter*.

¹⁶ So also Pancaro (1975:530f); Smith (1995:51f). Smith also helpfully points out that "the theological, terminological, and conceptual agreements between

'THE JEWS'

This aspect of John is one of the most perplexing for those who suggest a Jewish context for John. If any feature in the Fourth Gospel suggests 'distance from Judaism,' this would have to be it. The fact that John also uses 'the Jews' in a completely neutral sense does not alter the fact that he does use it in a way that suggests that the Johannine Christians would not be happy to be known as 'Jews'. Even given their claim to the title 'Israelites', the Johannine attitude towards 'the Jews' would at first glance seem to make it difficult to class Johannine Christianity as '*Jewish Christianity*'.

What must be noted first of all in connection with this subject is that the Gospel in its present form was written in the wake of the expulsion of the Johannine Christians from the synagogue. This was clearly a traumatic event for the group, since they did not leave by choice, but were expelled. If the Johannine Christians in this context had feelings of alienation from 'Judaism', this is hardly surprising. And for this reason, to draw conclusions about the relationship of the Johannine community to Judaism prior to the expulsion on the basis of a document written in the wake of this traumatic event is as ill-advised as judging 'Jewish' views of Gentiles on the basis of literature written in the aftermath of the war of A.D. 70.¹⁷

However, we should note here as well that the Johannine references to 'the Jews' can be read very differently than is done by Casey. Dunn, for

Paul and John do not go beyond what could have been established on the basis of widely held early Christian emphases and beliefs. In other words, it is a dubious procedure to attempt to understand the theology of John as if it were a development on the basis of, and beyond, Paul" (1995:51). See further n.4 above.

¹⁷ Cf. McKnight (1991:20). We may also ask, in light of the widespread view that expulsion from the synagogue decisively renders the Johannine Christians as 'no longer Jews' (so e.g. Barrett 1975:70), at what stage a sectarian group ceases to be part of its parent body and becomes a clearly distinct group, and whether the clarity with which we may view such issues with hindsight does not indeed obscure the real ambiguity of the situation at the time. For example, one may ask when the Methodists ceased to be Anglicans, or when Martin Luther ceased to be a Catholic. Similar questions illustrating the difficulties involved in this issue may be drawn from the whole history of Christianity as well as from the histories of other religions and groups.

example, considers that "The prominence and character of this tension between Jesus and 'the Jews' point the exegete firmly toward a mainly Jewish context for the fourth Gospel" (1991a:303; see his more detailed discussion, 1994:442f). It is also important to acknowledge, as Casey himself does (1991:187), that at least one stream of the Johannine community maintained a Jewish self-identity, referring to outsiders as 'Gentiles' (3 John 7). A far better explanation than Casey's for the phenomenon of Johannine Christianity is that its origins are firmly Jewish Christian, but that the community had to redefine itself and its identity in response to the attempt by post-70 Jewish leaders to establish their own particular form of Judaism as the dominant form, and to exclude, along with many other aspects of earlier Jewish diversity, the Johannine Christians. As Dunn concludes, "John's usage indicates not so much a clear distancing of the Johannine congregation from 'the Jews'... as an acknowledgement of a dispute over the heritage of pre-70 Jewish religion," with the Johannine Christians ceding the term 'Jews' to their opponents but keeping the term 'Israelites,' generally preferred by 'the Jews' as a self-designation, for themselves (Dunn 1992:200; cf. further on this issue: Dunn 1991a:304; 1991b:222; Meeks 1975; 1986; Pancaro 1975:494; Smiga 1992:160-171).

The Johannine use of 'the Jews' is thus best explained, not in terms of the Johannine Christians abandoning their Jewish roots, but rather in terms of the process of sect formation. The Johannine Christians refer to the Jews *en masse* because they are engaged in religious controversy of the sort which tends to produce factions and sects, and in this context such mass denunciations of one's opponents is a typical phenomenon.¹⁸ Further, John's language of denunciation, however strong, is not correctly classed as 'anti-semitic' if we conclude that it is in fact a *Jew* who is speaking this way.¹⁹ The Old Testament prophets frequently denounce the nation as a whole, even though they often speak alongside this of a faithful remnant who will be saved. That such images were taken up by vari-

¹⁸ Freyne (1985), Johnson (1989). This is not to excuse or explain away the Johannine attitude towards the Jews, but simply to show how it is possible for this to be an attitude held by *Jewish* Christians.

¹⁹ Barrett (1975:70) notes that "In the Fourth Gospel there is nothing stronger than the sayings of the Jew Paul: To the Jews I became as a Jew (1 Cor 9.20); and: Christ is the end of the Law (Rom 10.4)."

ous Jewish sects or parties in and around New Testament times is more than adequately attested by the literature which was found at Qumran. There, as in John, we find a group of Jews with distinctive beliefs denouncing the rest of their nation as 'children of darkness' and 'children of Beliar.' Yet in the Qumran scrolls we do not find the key term for our discussion, 'the Jews'. When we turn to the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, however, we do find the phrase used in a way that resembles the Johannine use. For example, in I.50 and V.11 'the Jews' is the designation used for the nation as a whole in its unbelief. It is of course true that, in general, the author does not use this phrase without qualification, speaking for the most part of 'the *unbelieving* Jews'. However, that a Jewish Christian author can present the apostle Peter as speaking about 'the Jews' as opponents, while he himself was a Jew, suggests that we should not too hastily draw conclusions concerning the nature of Johannine Christianity on the basis of the references to 'the Jews' in John's Gospel.

Before concluding our discussion of this aspect of the Fourth Gospel, we may note one further insight that may shed light on this Johannine phenomenon. Bruce Malina, in his seminal study of the cultural tendencies in the New Testament world, has pointed out that ancient Mediterranean cultures focused identity on groups rather than individuals (1981:53-60). In other words, the ancient mind tended to think in terms of what we today might call stereotypes. The individual was judged in terms of what was generally thought to be the case concerning his or her race, country, town or family. Numerous examples of this way of thinking can be found in the New Testament and other literature from the time, and it may fruitfully be suggested that the Johannine attitude to 'the Jews' is an example of the same phenomenon. The majority of Jews in John's time did not believe in Jesus, and had rejected the appeal made by Christians for them to do so. 'The Jews' as a whole could thus be considered in light of this factor and stereotyped accordingly. Just as Paul can refer to 'the Gentiles' as sinful while also apparently acknowledging that there are individual upright Gentiles,²⁰ so also John uses 'the Jews' to refer to the nation as a whole who do not believe, even though he is aware that there are

²⁰ Romans 2:13-16, 26. For other examples of this phenomenon see the passages cited by Malina (1981:57).

Jews who believe in Jesus, and can say that 'salvation is of the Jews' (John 4:22).

There are thus a number of important factors which are frequently overlooked in considering the use of the expression 'the Jews' in John. Through their use of this phrase, the Johannine Christians show their awareness that the religious leaders of the Jewish community from which they were expelled refused to recognize them as 'Jews.' If we are correct, with the majority of scholars, to set the Fourth Gospel in the context of Judaism as it was attempting to reformulate and redefine itself in the period after the council of Jamnia, then the Johannine Christians were probably not the only ones who felt that they were being unjustly deprived of their identity as 'Jews'. The Johannine Christians concede this title, but claim for themselves the generally preferred title 'Israel,' an unlikely procedure if the Johannine Christians were consciously and intentionally moving away from their Jewish roots and identity. The Johannine use of this phrase ('the Jews'), although distinctive, is not without parallel, as we have seen, and can be explained not only in terms of the social and historical setting of the community, but also the culture of the time. In light of the numerous factors we have reviewed, it is in no way implausible to suggest that John's Gospel is correctly classed as Jewish Christian and, rather than demonstrating distance from Judaism, represents part of the debate over 'who is a Jew?' which was so important in this period.

CONCLUSION

Given the diversity in both first century Judaism and in early Christianity, it would be reasonable to presume that there was also a certain amount of diversity in Jewish Christianity. One corollary of this is that there is no need to force John into a set mould: John could differ from a given definition of Jewish Christianity in one or more areas, and yet possibly still be rightly classed as a Jewish Christian work in some sense. Yet what is striking is the fact that it is possible to read and understand John quite naturally as containing precisely those features which have been singled out by many scholars as distinctively Jewish Christian: adoptionist Christology, Torah observance, and a continuing Jewish or Israelite self-identity. Although there is still work to be done in this area, it would seem reasonable to conclude that, in light of the evidence we have surveyed and the many other indicators of Jewish influence on and Jewish elements

in John's Gospel,²¹ the burden of proof rests on those who seek to deny a Jewish/Jewish-Christian setting for the Fourth Evangelist's community and Gospel.

²¹ See, e.g., the evidence presented in Quispel (1972) and in the other essays in the same volume.

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